STATUS OF WOMEN

Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women

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Including Women: Comments on Towards Prosperity – A Discussion Paper on Developing an Economic Growth Strategy for Nova Scotia

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The Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women was established by provincial statute in 1977. The Council's mandate under the Advisory Council on the Status of Women Act is to advise the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women and to bring forward the concerns of women in Nova Scotia.

The Council's work touches on all areas of women's lives, including...

- ♀ family life
- ♀ economics
- ♀ legal rights
- ♀ sexuality
- ♀ health
- ♀ education
- ♀ paid and unpaid work
- ♀ violence

Council pays close attention to the experiences of women who face barriers to full equality because of race, age, language, class, ethnicity, religion, ableness, sexual orientation, or various forms of family status.

We are committed to voicing women's concerns to government and the community through policy research, information services and community development. Working cooperatively with women and equality seeking organizations, our mission is to advance equality, fairness and dignity for all women.

Including Women: Comments on *Towards Prosperity* – A Discussion Paper on Developing an Economic Growth Strategy for Nova Scotia

Introduction

The Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women is pleased to submit these comments in response to the invitation for public input into the draft discussion paper *Towards Prosperity*.

Towards Prosperity was drafted by the Nova Scotia Department of Economic Development to address the perceived need for an economic strategy for Nova Scotia. The document outlines a vision for what Nova Scotia and Nova Scotians need to do to reach our full potential economically, as well as strategies that the Nova Scotia government, in partnership with business, communities, and other stakeholders, should focus on to achieve economic prosperity in Nova Scotia. The Department of Economic Development has invited public input on the draft *Towards Prosperity* document because the final document will outline the government's economic strategy for the next several years.

Towards Prosperity contains: a vision statement; a discussion of key aspects of the Nova Scotia economy; a set of guiding principles; some critical factors necessary for success; proposals for six strategic directions; suggested performance measures; and a discussion about the more limited role for government in "doing" economic development. We will discuss each of these elements in turn in the comments that follow.

To facilitate Council's input, the discussion paper, *Towards Prosperity,* was circulated to Council members in early June. Chris Bryant from the Department of Economic Development was invited to make a presentation on the discussion paper at the Council meeting on June 24th, at which time he invited comments and questions from Council members.

These comments are based on relevant research information and data, and on issues which have been identified by Council members themselves or through input to Council from other women's organizations.

In general, the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women believes it is important that the assumptions that guide *Towards Prosperity*, and the strategies which are proposed, will be inclusive of women's expectations and will reflect the diversity of women's interests and realities. This includes those of Aboriginal women, Black women, immigrant women, women with disabilities, low-income women, single mothers, young women, older women, and rural women.

The discussion paper posed some key questions for public response. However, in addressing the elements outlined in the document, we have focused on two issues:

- Will the proposed vision, principles, critical success factors and strategic directions in *Towards Prosperity* ensure that women in Nova Scotia, whatever their status, location, or background, are fully included?

- What key elements, presently missing from *Towards Prosperity*, would help to ensure that women have the opportunity to reach their full economic potential?

I The Vision

The two major goals outlined in the vision statement: "a vibrant, confident Nova Scotia in which all of its citizens are able to achieve their full potential" and "a province of self-sufficient communities" are laudable goals which we believe most women in Nova Scotia subscribe to.

We also like the fact that in moving towards these goals, the vision statement includes the need to take full regard for the things that Nova Scotians care about:

- a caring quality of life;
- stewardship of the environment;
- respect for the history that defines us; and
- the natural beauty of the province.

However, we are disappointed that there is little discussion or reference to these values in the rest of the document.

We also note that the vision statement goes beyond a discussion of "a destination" or final objective to outline four ways to achieve them. These are:

- education and training to address the labour needs of the new economy;
- a strong entrepreneurial culture and competitive business climate;

- ✧ a network of physical connections for commerce; and
- ✧ a network of "indefinable" human connections that would make Nova Scotia a place where we want to raise our children.

First, it is not clear what the status of these elements are in relation to the rest of the document. Are they to be regarded as both necessary and sufficient conditions to achieve the vision? If so, we question whether these conditions are the only ones necessary or sufficient to achieve the vision or destination we want to reach, especially if women are to be fully included.

Second, it is noteworthy that the first three conditions are also elaborated in the strategic directions, which forms the core of the proposed economic strategy. The omission of any further discussion of the fourth condition -- Nova Scotia as a place where we want to raise our children -- is unfortunate because it unduly limits the scope of the document and serves to marginalize an aspect of life that has a great deal of relevance for most Nova Scotians, especially women.

Further elaboration and discussion of this condition (for example in the case studies) might have demonstrated the necessary linkages between economic and social development, and the need to nurture both if our economy is to prosper and become sustainable in a manner that supports the people it is intended to benefit. Further development of the links between economy and society would be a useful next step in the implementation of this proposed strategy.

II The Context

The context section of *Towards Prosperity* is based on an analysis of what are deemed to be the emerging strengths of the Nova Scotia economy, the fiscal realities, and the economic challenges.

Economic strength often comes from economic diversification. It is well known that one of the problems for the Canadian economy in general, and Nova Scotia in particular, is that we have relied too much on a narrow band of industries, mainly based on resource extraction, as a means to fuel our economy. This over-reliance on a few industries with little value added capacity leaves our economy vulnerable to changes in global demand or problems related to resource depletion.

As Nova Scotia places more reliance on oil and gas to drive our economy, we would do well to learn from past mistakes. Most resource industries are by

definition limited to the abundance of the resource and it is certainly true that many of the older more "traditional" sectors of the economy, such as fishing, have been experiencing difficulties because of this. The prevailing view appears to be that these traditional industries (coal, steel, fishing, forestry, agriculture) may be in general decline and we should therefore turn our attention away from them in order to nurture new demand-driven resource extraction industries such as oil and gas or mineral extraction.

However, one of the problems with an approach which shifts the emphasis entirely to "new" resource-based sectors is that we are in danger of repeating old mistakes: over-reliance on one or two resources, lack of attention to sustainability, either of communities or of the resource itself, and to the environmental, economic, and social impacts when the resource is depleted.

As many in the fishing and farming sectors will attest, these "industries" are more than an economic livelihood, they are a way of life. We should not simply abandon the older traditional resource-based sectors of the economy which in the past have sustained communities and shaped our common history and way of life.

Both the new and the old need to be nurtured in ways which ensure the sustainability of the resource, limits negative environmental impacts, and provide value-added spin offs which can not only lead to a more diversified economy but could also, perhaps, help to preserve the resource.

Another suggested focus in *Towards Prosperity* is to pay more attention to developing a "new" technologically-driven, knowledge-based economy. As *Towards Prosperity* argues, investments in higher education, advanced technology, innovation, and research and development are essential if Nova Scotia is to nurture business development and generate jobs in the "new" information and knowledge-based economies based on science and computer technologies.

In the process, we need to ensure that girls and young women from diverse backgrounds and cultural groups are included in the new and emerging fields which are driving these developments. At present, the participation of women in most fields of engineering, science, and computer technology lags behind that of men. While women appear to do well in the "softer" end of businesses based on information and other technologies, young women are not at the leading edge of these industries nor are they reaping the same economic rewards from the "new" economy as men. More must be done to encourage the entry *and* retention of women and girls in these fields, otherwise we will simply replicate the stratified,

sex segregated work force of the "old" economy which governments and others are still trying to rectify.

Towards Prosperity also notes that the quality of life in Nova Scotia, its history, its diverse communities and its natural beauty are important assets for Nova Scotia if we are to nurture these knowledge and information technology based businesses -- to say nothing of our burgeoning tourism industry. So much of the quality of life of which we are so proud is based on what were once vibrant, sustainable, rural communities. Continued efforts to enable these communities to sustain themselves must not be hampered by overly hasty decisions with a short run perspective.[1]

As Judith Maxwell, President of Canadian Policy Research Networks has pointed out:

> Globalization and new technologies have unleashed three contradictory forces -- prosperity, polarization and an apparent paralysis of public policy....Many hardworking, middle-class people are losing ground financially at the same time as their access to public services is diminishing....[these have] set off at least two countervailing forces -- interdependence and a quest for community....A sense of identity and belonging to a community can help combat the helplessness triggered by globalization. While no single actor can deal with the issues presented by globalization, governments could play an important role in guarding the public interest.[2]

Community economic development strategies, previously supported by both federal and provincial governments, have been important in giving many of the communities which are in trouble in Nova Scotia a glimmer of hope in these difficult times. The Nova Scotia government must continue to take full advantage of opportunities to partner with the federal government in social and economic development initiatives, and should continue to work with them to remove bureaucratic and regulatory obstacles and barriers so individuals can access opportunities to reach their full potential, and communities can initiate and build sustainable development.

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[1]As has been pointed out by the Coastal Communities Network and others, in a situation where fishing communities are trying to adapt to the changes in the fishery, it is contradictory to abandon or privatize wharves because the wharves provide part of an infrastructure for developing other businesses, including tourism.

[2]From a speech by Judith Maxwell entitled "Canadian Society in Transition," reported in CPRN Networknews, no. 8, winter 2000.

In partnership with community organizations and others, community economic development strategies which are locally based and involve the community can be a powerful vehicle for including women and others who may feel marginalized from mainstream economic development initiatives. We are concerned that community economic development and women's inclusion in it do not appear as core strategies in the main body of the document. Both levels of government need to continue to support community economic development initiatives so that these communities, many of which feel abandoned by governments, can be nurtured to become vibrant, self-sufficient, caring communities once again.

III Principles

Towards Prosperity outlines six principles which are to act as guides for the proposed strategy: (1) focus on improving the quality of all jobs; (2) encourage the enterprising spirit; (3) foster innovation, uniqueness and quality design; (4) promote our competitive advantages; (5) provide equality of opportunity; (6) support sustainable development. We focus our comments on four of these principles.

(1) Improving the quality of jobs, access to education and skills, and higher pay for the jobs women do is one of the top priorities for Council. Women who work full time in the labour force still earn only about 70 percent of what men earn. While there have been advances for women in some areas and sectors, these advances have not kept pace with the massive influx of women into the labour market over the past twenty to thirty years. One consequence of this is that women run a much higher risk of being poor than men. This is especially a problem for single mothers, whether they are employed full time or not.

A second major problem for women is working conditions and benefits. Not enough employers in Nova Scotia provide good benefits -- private pensions, maternity leaves, health, and extended medical benefits. This is especially the case for small businesses and the service sector where many women are employed. In addition, women are more likely to work in non-standard employment such as part-time, term, or contract jobs which are often excluded from the same kind of benefits enjoyed by those who work full time.

Many women are also employed in family businesses, but they are often ineligible for the same kind of benefits (employment insurance, maternity benefits, pensions, etc.) that other workers enjoy. A growing proportion of women are in business for themselves or are self-employed. The provision of a system of benefits similar to those enjoyed by employed workers is another issue

that needs to be examined and addressed. All of these issues need attention if the quality of jobs is to improve and women are to take their equal place in the labour market.

Improvements in the economic performance of businesses in the province may help to establish the conditions to address some of these problems, but experience in other countries, for example, the United States, demonstrates that we cannot necessarily rely on "the market" to ensure that the benefits of economic growth will fairly "trickle down" in the form of higher wages and better benefits to all workers. Despite a commitment to smaller government, it is vital that no governments abdicate their proper roles and responsibilities in defining fair labour standards for all workers.

In ensuring workers are appropriately skilled and educated, we must also ensure that there are equal opportunities for both women and men, including those from less privileged economic backgrounds, to gain access to higher education and skills training.

Access to literacy programs and basic education is still a barrier to many people in Nova Scotia, including women. We think it is a scandal that in Nova Scotia people must pay fees to obtain the equivalent of a grade 12 education after they reach the age of 21. If we are serious about providing equal opportunity for all Nova Scotians, we must do a better job of removing barriers to basic education.

Single mothers and others on social assistance need more help in making a viable transition to the labour market. Free educational upgrading programs, access to pharmacare benefits and child-care, as well as the ability to pursue training or education beyond the current two year limit, is essential if women are not to continue to be caught in the poverty trap, an entrapment too often transferred to children.

In general, access to higher education is becoming more difficult because funding pressure in the post-secondary education sector has meant that fees are increasing but access to grants have declined. Students who increasingly must rely on student loans are beginning to question whether the economic returns for pursuing higher education, especially at the university level, are worth the cost. To some extent, this questioning of the value of higher education has been fueled by the idea, promoted in recent years by some business advocates, that higher education institutions should focus more on "training" for the labour market rather than on academic knowledge and learning.

While computer, technical, business, and marketing skills and expertise are increasingly in demand, it is graduates with a well-rounded educational foundation and analytical skills that are likely to achieve the best results in business and in the new information and knowledge-based economy.

Nevertheless, we do recognize that by putting more emphases than in the past on applied skills and technological training, Nova Scotia has begun to rectify a previous imbalance between the resources available to community colleges and those of universities. We are glad, therefore, to see that the range of programs in the community college system has improved over the last ten years. However, we remain concerned that the rate of improvement is not fast enough to catch up with those provinces where a quality community college system has existed for many years. In addition, we are also concerned that the participation of women in so-called "non-traditional" programs of study at both community colleges and universities have not improved significantly in many scientific, engineering, technology, and trades occupations. Vigorous action is needed to address this inequitable situation.

We must recognize that both academic and applied knowledge and skills are important to our future. Encouraging both male and female students to improve their technical skills and to pursue advanced academic studies in various fields, including, though not exclusively, in science and computer science, is especially important if we are to achieve results.

Nova Scotia has a right to be proud of its institutions of higher learning. To be successful in nurturing the "new" economy in Nova Scotia, we must build on these assets. This means that we not only encourage universities to place more emphasis on innovation, research, and development, but also ensure that the academic base that creates a broader culture of learning and a university's capacity to attract the best male and female students from all economic and cultural backgrounds is not eroded in the process.

(2) In encouraging the enterprising spirit of the private sector, especially entrepreneurs and small businesses, we must help to ensure that women's entrepreneurial capacity is both recognized and nurtured. Research shows that women and men approach business development differently and that women often get started on smaller amounts of money. Commercial banks and government economic development or lending agencies need to be more sensitive to gender differences in the way women and men approach business development and to be encouraged to take as many risks on woman-led businesses as they do on those led by men.

Despite their rate of success in business, however, many women complain that their business ideas are often not taken seriously and it is still difficult for them to get access to small business loans. Women often need both financial and moral support to get started in business and, despite their good business ideas, they may need better support or training in specific aspects of running a small business. Gender sensitive community economic development initiatives and programs which encourage women to participate in community economic development such as the Women's CED Network and the MSVU Centre for Women in Business can help to provide an infrastructure of support and training.

(3) We are pleased that **providing equality of opportunity to all Nova Scotians** is a principle in this strategy. We must recognize, however, that this principle should also entail a strategy to level the playing field so that barriers to equal opportunities for Aboriginal, Black, low-income women and men, and people with disabilities are addressed.

Our youth are having to move elsewhere not only to "see the world" but to have a chance to make a life for themselves. Although leaving Nova Scotia to get experience elsewhere is not a bad thing for young people to do, too many find it difficult to return to build careers here. If Nova Scotia is not to become a province mainly populated by older and retired people, ensuring that there is a more diversified economy and viable economic opportunities for both young women and men to build careers in Nova Scotia will itself have spin-off effects that can only benefit the economy in the long run.[3]

Predictions are that there will be a labour shortage as our population ages. If young people and young families are to be encouraged to stay in Nova Scotia, business must be encouraged to provide better working conditions. The labour force participation of women and their well being as workers are affected by the provision of health and medical benefits, maternity leave, private pension plans, family leave provisions, and access to child care. All of these are long-standing

[3]In *The Quality of Work*, Graham Lowe argues that young graduates are often "under-employed," not using the skills and knowledge they have gained in post-secondary education to full advantage and that employers need to create more meaningful entry-level jobs for youth. Lowe also argues that "there is a growing gap between the rhetoric and the practice of lifelong learning and skill development and that very few of the organizations that are committed to training have made the leap to a culture of continuous learning." CPRN Work Network Commentary, April 24, 2000.

problem areas for women which need to be addressed if we are to provide equal opportunities for both women and men to build careers in the province.[4]

(4) Support for **sustainable development in building our communities** is also of particular concern to women and their families.

When communities are in economic decline, more social and family problems emerge or get worse. There is often increasing stress in families and in the community. It is women who often try to hold things together in families and the community at large. However, women's experience and ideas have not always been recognized by governments and others who seek to find more formal "solutions" to problems at the community level. Women's full participation in sustainable development initiatives is crucial if they are to be successful in the long term.

IV Critical Success Factors

The paper identifies partnerships as a critical success factor in supporting the process and the strategic directions (see V below). The identified partnerships are with communities; private-sector partnerships; interdepartmental and intergovernmental partnerships; partnerships for Cape Breton.

As discussed in other sections of these comments, we need to ensure that diverse women and the diversity of women's concerns are included and are taken into account in the development of these different types of partnerships because the record in the past has not been particularly good. This includes the existing regional economic development agencies which were established by government in 1994 and which are alluded to in the report. Although women's participation in these agencies has improved in recent years, this has mainly been due to the advocacy efforts of women and women's organizations. While there are some notable exceptions, the inclusion of women and of women's diverse realities and concerns in some of these agencies is still less than adequate.

[4]Research directed by Graham Lowe for the CPRN Work Network found that there is a need to place more emphasis on providing good work environments and on nurturing the talents of employees. More healthy work environments, family friendly work-places, and participatory styles of management were flagged as issues which should be addressed. CPRN Commentary, April 24, 2000.

We must also ensure that the goal of improving the quality of jobs is not jeopardized by any private-sector partnerships which are established. Although economic growth may improve with private-sector partnerships, experience in most countries shows that economic growth on its own does not necessarily translate into better jobs for all or to an improved quality of life. As has been demonstrated by organizations such as GPI Atlantic which promotes alternative measures of economic well-being, average economic growth (as measured by GDP for example) can increase while the overall quality of life (as measured by such things as income gaps, unpaid work, environmental problems and crime rates) may decline. We must not strive for economic growth at all costs. We want prosperity that fosters the well being of all Nova Scotians.

As discussed earlier, next steps for realizing *Towards Prosperity* should further integrate *all* aspects of the vision statement *and* the principles into the "nuts and bolts" of the approaches advocated in the rest of the document.

V Strategic Directions

Towards Prosperity **proposes six strategic directions** out of an array of other possibilities. These are: support for innovation; an improved business climate; an appropriate labour market (i.e., a properly trained labour force); more export and marketing opportunities; investment in Nova Scotia; improved infrastructure (i.e., transportation; pipelines; information and computer technology).

We have addressed many of these issues above. In general, however, we are disappointed in the limited scope of the six strategic directions. There is little integration into the discussion of the strategies of some crucial principles outlined earlier in the document. Some of the elements raised in the vision statement are not elaborated or are missing altogether. Crucial aspects of the Nova Scotia economy, such as the development of tourism or the burgeoning arts and culture sectors, are not even mentioned.

Equal opportunity and what that would mean in practice is also not discussed in this section. The description of the labour market strategy in particular is too narrowly focused on "training" rather than the broader concept of learning. While training is important, focusing only on this is too limiting because it does not allow discussion of the broader issues of literacy and equal access to higher education which we discussed above.

The discussion about infrastructure is too limited, with the focus entirely on the physical infrastructure and the "new" resource and technologically driven sectors.

As discussed above, some of the older industries like agriculture and fishing which make Nova Scotia an attractive place to live are not mentioned in this or other contexts.

Of particular importance to women is that the strategy makes absolutely no further mention of the human and social networks or infrastructure alluded to (in passing) in the vision statement. A solid infrastructure of social policies in the form of services and support is essential. Economists warn that there are economic costs involved in allowing social problems to go unaddressed as there are to unfettered social change. At the same time, social policies serve to bolster economic development by preventing social problems and by providing stability and the capacity for communities and families to adapt to change.[5]

Women have a particular interest in ensuring that our social policies and social services are sound. Women are often combining several jobs -- as a mother, a caregiver for an elderly relative, a volunteer in the community, and as an employee. Women know that issues like access to health care services, child care, services for families in trouble, health benefits, good labour standards, support for single mothers on social assistance making a transition to the labour market, access to literacy programs, and so on are intricately connected to their ability to participate on an equal basis in the labour market and to the economic well being of themselves and those they care about. This may be why most public opinion polls show a gender gap when respondents are asked to chose between issues like tax relief or deficit reduction and social program.

We do not believe it is adequate to develop an economic strategy in the absence of, or in isolation from, a social policy framework.

Again, we quote Judith Maxwell of CPRN:

The best public policies will integrate economic and social goals -- in the workplace and in society at large....Inclusion, integration, and participation are community and national building strategies. They create the foundation for future economic success in a knowledge-based marketplace.[6]

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[5]This type of argument is made in Lars Osberg, "Sustainable Social Development," June 1992; Lars Osberg, "An Index of Economic Well-being for Canada," 1998; Ron Colman, "Measuring Sustainable Development: An Application of the Genuine Progress Index to Nova Scotia," GPI Atlantic, 1998.

[6]Judith Maxwell, "Canadian Society in Transition," op.cit.

VI Measures for Economic Progress

The document proposes ways to **measure economic progress**. However, again, we question whether these measures of progress adequately reflect the vision and principles. We also question whether these measures would tell us anything very much about whether the strategic directions are improving the economic potential of women, including Aboriginal women, Black women, women with disabilities, women in rural areas, single mothers, low-income women, young women, and older women.

VII The Role of Government

A limited role for government in economic development must be balanced against government's continuing duty to advance the public interest. As Judith Maxwell argues in the paper we have already quoted, governments must:

- ✧ balance short- and long-term goals by cutting taxes and strengthening social infrastructures;
- ✧ encourage investment in public spaces by community and business leaders, as well as build connections and trust within communities;
- ✧ mobilize the investment in economic opportunities for the young and the marginalized; and
- ✧ design regulatory and governance structures based on shared standards and guidelines.

We believe this is a strategy which would be well worth considering in Nova Scotia and one which could have the potential to address many of our concerns outlined above.

As we now move into the twenty-first century, it is time that all of our policies take women into account and become inclusive of women's diverse concerns so that we can achieve equality, fairness, and dignity for all women in Nova Scotia.

VIII Recommendations

The Advisory Council recommends the following actions:

- ✧ That the next phase of this work elucidate the linkages between economic and social development and, with the purpose of developing a social policy framework for Nova Scotia, move forward with a public dialogue

about the kind of social policies and human services required to support the values outlined in the vision statement and the principles.

- Integrate into the strategies, alternative approaches to economic development which might better support stated values and principles such as "achieving our full potential," "equal opportunities," and "sustainable, self sufficient, caring communities." These could include (but not necessarily be limited to) strategies such as:
  - community-based resource management (e.g. for addressing current problems in some of the "older" resource-based sectors of the economy such as fishing and logging);
  - a variety of community economic development strategies which promote the goals of sustainability, equity and inclusion;
  - removing barriers for all Nova Scotians, whatever their age, to access basic education up to grade 12.
- Promote a more diversified economy by encouraging the development of "value added" economic development, especially in resource-based industries, and by promoting a mix of different sized businesses in a variety of sectors.
- Promote a business and policy climate which encourages and supports women to start and grow small businesses.
- Continue to promote the development of skill training opportunities through the community college system, ensuring that there are equal opportunities for women to access and participate in a wide range of trades and technology programs.
- In addition to promoting the development of skills training, recognize the value of life-long learning and of a literate, well-educated (in the broadest sense of these terms) workforce and citizenry by integrating strategies to ensure equal opportunities for Nova Scotians to access literacy, lifelong learning and post-secondary education programs.
- Recognize the role of social policies, labour standards, human resources policies and family-friendly workplaces in improving the quality of jobs and in encouraging the equal participation of women in the economy.
- Continue and strengthen federal-provincial partnerships on economic and social development, to support positive outcomes for the people of Nova Scotia in as cost-effective a manner as possible.